



# INTRODUCTION OF SHAHNAMEH MANUSCRIPT AVAILABLE IN SAADABAD PALACE LIBRARY

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## ABSTRACT

Historical illustrated manuscripts and written works in the museums of a country are among the cultural and spiritual heritage of that country and their introduction is very important. In this study, an attempt was made to introduce one of the valuable historical and artistic works of Saadabad Palace, which is an illustrated and unknown manuscript of Ferdowsi's Shahnameh.

Unlike many manuscripts of Shahnameh in museums and libraries inside and outside Iran, which have been repeatedly considered by artists and experts, this manuscript has not received expert attention. Examining the Shahnameh in Saadabad Palace qualitatively and aesthetically is an attempt to identify and introduce this manuscript.

According to the study of the paintings of this exquisite and valuable manuscript, this Shahnameh seems to have been created in the Timurid and early Safavid periods, approximately between the second half of the ninth century AH and the first half of the tenth century AH. According to the characteristics of the paintings in terms of composition, constituent elements, type of color, coloring used, etc., this work was probably first influenced by Shiraz School as the main cradle of Timurid style and in later stages, it was more influenced by the characteristics of Herat School. Even after the decline of the Timurid period and the rise of the Safavids, due to the power of the Herat School and Timurid artists until the first third of the tenth century AH, the originality of Timurid imagery is still preserved in this Shahnameh, despite the inclusion of Safavid elements in these paintings and the great similarity of the details of the paintings with the Tabriz School.

**KEYWORDS:** painting, stylistics, Timurid period, Safavid period, Shahnameh paintings, Shahnameh of Saadabad Palace.

## INTRODUCTION:

The antiquities of each country refer to the history of that country. Many related situations and conditions prevailing over time can be examined by analyzing antiquities (Dhali et al., 2020). The antiquities of each country are generally a symbol of that country (Lai and Wang, 2017).

Shahnameh is one of the most precious and valuable works with a high status for us Iranians and even non-Iranians. Our national customs and identities are preserved in the Shahnameh. Otherwise, many of the cultural components of our customs and identities would be destroyed by devastating historical events. Shahnameh is important not only in terms of its literature and poetic speech but also rather than being a collection of poetic stories, it is a genealogy in which each word and line reflects the wishes of our ancestors and our aspirations.

According to the studies on the Shahnameh in Saadabad Palace and based on the type of imagery, design, drawing, and in general painting and the page layout of this collection, it seems that a lot of effort has been made to create it. By studying this work, which indicates the visual and conceptual richness of its paintings, in addition to gaining valuable artistic information, we can understand the intellectual atmosphere and anthropology of the time of the creation of this great masterpiece. Although the exact time of the creation of this valuable work is not completely known, the studies Shahnameh is quite worthy of consideration and special attention due to its unique visual features and quality.

As mentioned, the true history of this Shahnameh is not completely clear. However, according to the studies, it is said that the experts of Farah Pahlavi's office bought many works of art to create historical-cultural museums on her orders in 1963. As can be seen from the history of museums in Iran, many museums in Iran were founded and established in the same year, for example, the Museum of Decorative Arts on Karimkhan Zand Street in Tehran. The Shahnameh, now known as the Shahnameh of Saadabad Palace, was one of the works purchased by experts of Farah Pahlavi's office. Unfortunately, no document has been found for its purchase at this time. This Shahnameh and many works of art were kept in the repository of the Museum of Decorative Arts in Tehran. However, the entry of water into the repository, unfortunately, caused a lot of damage to the works and this book was separated from the headband (it is worth mentioning that the Shahnameh was worn and its sheets were separated even at the time of purchase). The entry of water became an excuse to close the museum, and as a result, all its works were transferred to other museums.

The closure of the Museum of Decorative Arts and the transfer of some of its manuscripts to the Saadabad Complex coincided with the establishment of the Mir Emad Calligraphy Museum in one of the buildings of the Saadabad Complex, formerly the residence of Farahnaz and Ali Reza Pahlavi. Thus, the manuscripts of the Museum of Decorative Arts were transferred to the Mir Emad Calligraphy Museum, and the manuscript of the Shahnameh was registered among

the works of this museum. In 1999, the decision was made to restore and repair the Shahnameh in coordination and cooperation with the Institute for the Protection and Restoration of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism, and the Shahnameh was transferred there. The mentioned work was there bound by experts and its acidity was also controlled (it should be mentioned that the effects of unprincipled and traditional restorations can be seen on it).

Unfortunately, the decision was made to transfer some departments of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism to Shiraz in 2010. One of those departments is the Institute for the Protection and Restoration of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism. Following this decision, the Shahnameh was returned to the Saadabad Complex and its restoration work was stopped. However, the purpose of this decision was to deliver the Shahnameh to the Central Library of the Saadabad Historical Complex and to keep it in the Saadabad Library repository. This Shahnameh has remained unknown until now. For the first time, an attempt has been made to introduce this exquisite work in the form of a dissertation. This study is extracted from a part of the mentioned dissertation with the hope that this study, which represents a small corner of this magnificent work, will be the first and solid step for the next more fruitful studies to introduce the real and true values of this masterpiece more fully.

The type of raw materials used in the paintings, calligraphy, and even the paper indicates that the use of high-quality raw materials and investment in its creation is quite purposeful so that this work has remained with the same original quality of colors until now. Based on the above, the history of this Shahnameh is ambiguous because there is no sign of the creators of this original work or perhaps it has not been achieved yet. This precious work has unfortunately been left out of intensive care or expert examination because it seems insignificant. Investigating the effect

The layout of the Shahnameh of Saadabad Palace is done very carefully. The tabulations and the accuracy in drawing the margins or the placement of the paintings, etc., are indicative of this. Although in all pages, these line drawings and tabulations are done and marked with clear lines, in some pages containing paintings, the margins are either designed in a single color or deliberately hidden under the colors of the paintings. The reason for this seems to be to prioritize the composition or framing of paintings over the margins in the layout.

The proportion between the size of the paintings and their constituent elements is also important. Although the figures and animals are larger than the other elements, the whole composition is such that it creates a good balance throughout the page concerning the text. By looking at the obtained pages, it was found that this manuscript has 515 pages, 51 of which 51 have paintings (there are single paintings on all pages and two separate paintings on one page). Due to the special layout of this manuscript, which has a great variety, the paintings on the pages are placed in different places, with 22 paintings at the bottom, 16 paintings at the top,

and 14 paintings in the middle of the pages. The different places of the paintings on different pages show the strong style of layout of Shahnameh of Saadabad Palace

#### Investigating the visual features of the paintings in the Shahnameh of Saadabad Palace:

The paintings in the manuscript of Shahnameh of Saadabad Palace have unique visual features. The most basic common feature of all paintings is the combination of very vivid and radiant colors. Vibrant and lively design is another prominent feature of these paintings. The designs and other components of the paintings are drawn so freely that they may often be referred to as careless or clumsy. However, it can be said that the carelessness in the paintings is not due to weakness, but to the painter's professionalism in adopting innovative artistic practices. The mobility of figures and animal motifs is the most obvious feature that can be mentioned. Drawing figures in different positions as standing, sitting, half-standing, bent, etc. indicates the power of the painter's pen. The painter has tried to play an effective role in arousing the viewer's emotions with delicacy and precision in creating the body movements of the characters and coordination in the final composition of the paintings. So the painter has paid great attention to showing the various physical and mental states of the characters. The rotation of the animal body is no exception to this type of design and has been done with the same strength.

Unlike figures and animal motifs that have been painted with great care and attention and seem to have been the priority, the paintings are painted in a very simple and concise way.

The background of paintings includes grasslands, hills, and rocks with gentle slopes, each with its characteristics. As can be seen in most of the paintings, the ground is often blue, the surface of which is covered with some small flowering shrubs, summarized in a color scheme that contrasts perfectly with the background. The flowering shrubs, although slightly larger than normal in size, are painted quite simply, without going into great detail. It seems that the motifs of flowers and plants are not very important and are painted only to fill the space or to continue the previous traditions.

Lands near rivers or springs are painted as green grass and relatively full of flowers compared to the extreme parts of the background. Rocks or hills are often painted quite simply. However, the sky is used to separate them with slightly darker chiaroscuros at the edges

Water painting is used significantly in the paintings Shahnameh of Saadabad Palace Library. All painted water is now black due to the use of silver.

Accuracy in drawing all the details of the costumes and showing the position or personality of the characters by the type of costumes are important features that seem to have a higher priority than other elements in the paintings. For example, Rostam's dress, which is decorated with tiger skin, is the same design in all the paintings, so that the costume he wears is in the shape of a Babr-e Bayān (Palangineh) skin and the hat he wears is in the shape of a white tiger head. Also, the head of the wand in his hands is in the shape of a cow's head, so Rostam's character can be identified in all the paintings with these characteristics.

Due to the importance of the elements in the paintings and their unique features, some of their important features in the Shahnameh of Saadabad Palace in terms of composition are described below.

#### Composition:

Leaving elements out of the frame or merging framing in the text space (poems) as complete freely is the most important feature in terms of the composition of paintings, which shows the harmony between the text and the paintings.

The harmony between the text and the paintings is shown in two ways:

- A) The type of framing (frame of paintings) and its size inside the page
- B) The method of painting the elements inside the space dedicated to paintings

The type of framing on the inside of the page means that the space allotted for drawing paintings is a rectangular frame and the texts are placed in vertical columns. Thus, although there is a deep content connection between the text and the paintings, the text and painting frames are visually independent of each other (Figure 1 (A and B)).

In most cases, the frame does not have a regular rectangular shape, and around the empty spaces is separated by a line (Figure 1 (C and D)).



Figure 1 (A and B). Regular and independent framing of paintings



Figure 1 (C and D). Irregular framing of drawings

The space allocated for drawing paintings is not a closed frame, which means that in addition to the freely designed framing itself, the arrangement and design of interior elements play an important role in inducing the interference of text and paintings so that when visually viewing the paintings with the text of the poems, the viewer sees them as two completely related subjects. This visual induction of text and paintings as a single in the viewer's eyes is on the one hand due to the harmony between the subject of the paintings and the text of the poems, and on the other hand due to the composition and placement of other elements in a completely dynamic way. Besides, some of them are half in the edges of the frame. For example, at the bottom of Figure 2 (A and B), the half-body of humans or animals, such as horses, inside the frame can be seen, either entering or leaving the frame. Their full form is sometimes standing or moving on the edges of the frame of paintings or the margins of the entire page on which the poems are written. Some elements leaving the frame are also observed in some paintings, which indicate the mobility and dynamics of the composition (Figure 2 (A and B)).





Figure 2 (A and B). Elements leaving the frame of paintings

In some cases, such as at the top of Figure 2 (A), creating a new composition or leaving the frame with the aim of taking the viewer's mind and eyes out of the page, etc. have given the painter more courage in removing elements from the painting frame so that it seems that the whole narrative space of the painting is deliberately directed outwards for conscious or unconscious reasons that are not known to us, and possibly for reasons such as the lack of space required for painting.

The priority of the elements in the whole composition of the paintings is from front to back as if the text of the visual narrative is depicted in the front part according to what is important. Gradually, as the text goes back into the painting, the characters or other elements are painted in a more general, concise, and less important way. The foreground has a higher priority than the background. The more the elements are pulled inward, the lower their importance and position. In this type of composition based on priorities, the painter seems to have deliberately adopted this method to create a kind of in-depth perspective.

#### Types of motifs painted in the Shahnameh studied:

##### Human motifs:

Some of the most important features of human motifs in the paintings of the Shahnameh of Saadabad Palace are their mobility, dynamism, and accuracy in drawing details of their physical and mental states. Human figures include men and women, although the number of men is much more than women.

The figures are painted in different positions such as sitting, standing, moving, half standing, lying down, kneeling, hanging, etc. Interestingly, there is a variety in each of the different positions. This places more emphasis on the dynamism and vitality of the figures in the composition of the paintings. For example, a position such as sitting, which is painted in different ways, is completely different in the way characters sit on horses, beds, floors, carpets, etc. and has an exemplary variety. This variety is also observed in other positions.

Most of the paintings in this Shahnameh depict scenes of battle and war, and the prevailing atmosphere seems to be masculine and violent. As the end pages approach, the scenes take on a calmer dimension, and the atmosphere of the paintings changes as if it becomes more mystical. However, with the change in the atmosphere governing the paintings, there is no change in the type of writing and the lines continue in the same way.

##### Animal motifs:

Various animal motifs are painted in the Shahnameh of Saadabad Palace Library, including horses, wolves, elephants, and mythical creatures such as dragons and phoenix. The most painted animal is the horse. The special attention of the painters in drawing the details of the horse from the body skin to its saddle is admirable.

##### Landscapes:

Landscapes include a variety of flowering shrubs, trees, water, grass, hills, and rocks. Leafy and flowering trees and flowering shrubs are painted in a very simple and concise way in the paintings of the Shahnameh of Saadabad Palace as if they are in the next priority and are used only to fill the space or to continue the landscape painting in the style of their predecessors. Enlarged single flowers are most commonly used.

##### Other decorative elements:

There are other motifs such as armaments, types of beds, pergolas, etc., all of which cannot be examined in this study. So one of the most important tools, namely underlay, especially carpet and rug, is examined, which is a good source of information to find the background of the creation of this manuscript. This is

because the type of carpets shown in these paintings belong to a specific period, especially the Timurid period when such motifs entered the painting. Due to the amount of space occupied by the painting, the carpets seem to be in large sizes of fabric and are spread all over the floor of the court hall or a standing pergola on nature (Figures 3(A and B)). The pattern of this type of large carpet has a combination of Arabesque and Khatai motifs, which is completely consistent with the specific type of carpet design composition, especially the overall flower design. Although the motifs are designed and painted transiently and without a care in processing and details, they have a considerable coherence in general so that they perfectly show the design of the carpet. In drawing the motifs of the carpets, in addition to the general composition of the design, which is the overall flower, in the details section, Arabesque cloud bands (Tchi) and Khatai bands are depicted with a type of Shah Abbasi flower, simple multi-pointed flowers, and small decorative petioles.

There is clear color contrast in the text and the margins and even the decorations on the carpets, which are in harmony with the other elements of composition in the paintings. This has also led to their color gloss because the motifs on the margins are monochromatic and are usually gold or ochre on a navy blue or black background. In the background, the dark-light method is used to show the decorations, so that if the background color is light blue or pink, in addition to darker blue or darker red, another contrasting color is used for the motifs on it.



Figure 3(A). Large fabric carpet with overall flower design decorated with Khatai bands, with cold colors, Shahnameh of Saadabad Palace



Figure 3(B). Large fabric carpet with overall flower design decorated with cloud (Tchi) and Khatai bands, with warm colors, Shahnameh of Saadabad Palace

#### CONCLUSION:

The Shahnameh of Saadabad Palace layout can be studied from any point of view, but considering that the subject of this study is studied with emphasis on paintings, significant results are obtained based on the documents regarding the time or historical period of the creation of this valuable masterpiece. According to studies, this Shahnameh seems to have been created during the Timurids (second half of the ninth century AH) and early Safavid periods (first half of the tenth century AH), because there are documents such as manuscripts, especially Shahnamehs left from the seventh century AH onwards, which can be compared to achieve these results. Important issues are studied to find out the time of creating this exquisite work, including color, design, painting, composition, etc. Other issues, although important, are omitted here due to a large number of issues.

According to the results, it can be said with certainty that the Shahnameh of Saadabad Palace was created after the eighth century AH because it was written in the Nastaliq script. Although there is a need for special research on the type of script, according to the generality and appearance of the script used, this issue can be stated because the Nastaliq script was invented in Tabriz in the eighth century AH. It is possible to help discover many issues related to this Shahnameh in terms of other features by paying attention to the generalities and details of the paintings as well as using the analytical-comparative method.

Seeing the paintings of the Shahnameh of Saadabad Palace, the first things that attract attention are its clear, vivid, and bright colors that remain strong after years of creating this magnificent work. Paints have not lost this unique feature despite all the serious damage they have suffered over time. The colors used in the paintings are very polished and transparent and a combination of orange, dark blue, light blue, brown, black, white, silver (which has blackened over time), grass green, olive green, dark pink, pale pink, ochre yellow, gold, and very little red. The type of colors used in terms of gloss, shine, and transparency is like that of the Shiraz School of the Timurid period, but the use of golden colors for the sky, the predominance of blue in many paintings, the use of a variety of brown colors, and the very low use of red are evidence that brings us closer to the mentioned date. The reason for this is that these features are related to the Herat School of the Timurid period. In this period, especially from the second half of

the ninth century AH, even the quality of pigments has gained a special richness and artists have made special efforts in providing the required colors with maximum quality. This feature is less or does not exist at all after the second half of the tenth century AH.

The other important point in recognizing the characteristics of the paintings of the Shahnameh of Saadabad Palace is the type of their frame and composition. This method, in which asymmetric frames are inside the text and sometimes the frame is taken out of the text, and also the type of composition of the elements inside the frame is linear and horizontal, and sometimes the elements are out of the frames, is very similar to the works of Shiraz school. However, it is affected by the Herat school in other respects, especially the dynamism and mobility of the elements.

Another important feature of the Shahnameh of Saadabad Palace is the type of design of its paintings because the type of design of the elements seems to be clumsy (perhaps this has made this Shahnameh seem insignificant and not receive enough attention). However, with a little care, it can be found that the creators of this work had great courage and pen power. The type of painting and the variety of designs and colors may confirm that this manuscript was created in a workshop environment by several people, each with a specific task. The main motifs in this work are painted based on human, animal, natural, decorative, and other related patterns.

The characteristics of the designs and drawing of the paintings indicate that this work was probably initially influenced by the Shiraz School because it has features such as a summarizing the number of elements of the paintings, a secluded and simple background, simple shrubs just to cover the secluded background, the shape of the rocks, the green single trees, and the lack of prioritization of the background in terms of accuracy in drawing their details. On the other hand, accuracy in drawing details, especially human and animal figures, emphasis on the theme of the event in the background, the type of decoration used to cover the characters, the movement and dynamics of the elements, and expressing emotions in the state and face of the characters or some other related elements are characteristics that belong to the Herat School. It seems that the most similarity that can be seen in the comparison of elements and their details with other schools of painting is related to the Tabriz school in the early Safavid period because in addition to the similarity of the type of painting people, clothing, horses, saddles and harnesses, and related decorations such as white necklaces, decorative elements of Khatai and Arabesque types, the painter's smooth pen in drawing details, the existence of Safavid period elements such as Ghezelbashi hat with sticks in red and black, paying attention to the moods of the people, and especially the mystical atmosphere in the paintings at the end of the Shahnameh of Saadabad Palace (which seems to have been created in the society under the influence of the atmosphere of extremist Shiism during the reign of Shah Ismail Safavid), show that this work was painted in the Tabriz School under the influence of the Herat School. According to historical evidence, Shah Ismail Safavid, after coming to power, transferred many artists, including Kamāl ud-Dīn Behzād, from Herat to Tabriz to work in court workshops. These artists established a new style in the art of painting and caused it to flourish. Therefore, it seems that all the works created in this historical period were influenced by the Herat School. However, since the place where the works were created changed from Herat to Tabriz, their school was called the Tabriz School. In addition to having the characteristics of the Herat School, the works of this school have their special characteristics that were mentioned above.

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